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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 001155

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR HALL SURVEYS EMPTY BREADBASKET

REF: HARARE 001019

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i. Eric T Schultz under Section 1.4
b/d

Summary

1. (C) During his August 11-13 visit to Zimbabwe, Ambassador Tony Hall witnessed firsthand the food insecurity caused by the GOZ's misguided agricultural policies and recurring drought, and the destruction caused by Operation Restore Order. UN representatives told Ambassador Hall a GOZ appeal for direct aid was unlikely but WFP had included 300,000 MT for Zimbabwe in its regional appeal for southern Africa. The WFP told Ambassador Hall that as many as 5 million people could need food assistance this year. The FAO told Ambassador Hall that Zimbabwe had been importing enough food over the past two months to cover the shortfall, but questioned the sustainability of this trend given the economy's marked decline. Ambassador Hall spoke to some Restore Order victims who told him they were in survival mode. However, he was denied entry to another set of victims at Hopely Farm, south of Harare. In a statement issued before his departure (emailed to AF/S), Ambassador Hall announced that the United States was donating \$51.8 million, or 73,500 MT of food assistance, to the WFP's appeal for southern Africa. End Summary.

UN Agencies Paint Bleak Picture

2. (C) Ambassador Hall began his three-day visit with a briefing by UN agencies on their humanitarian response to Zimbabwe's on-going food insecurity as well as their efforts to provide relief to the victims of Operation Restore Order. UNDP Resrep Agostinho Zacarias noted that the GOZ was lukewarm about humanitarian activities and was suspicious of the international community, especially international NGOs, which it believed had a time change agenda. This made conducting relief efforts very difficult, in particular it had impeded humanitarian access to Zimbabweans in need. Nonetheless, the needs in the country were real and the UN and its sister agencies were committed to working with the GOZ to address them.

3. (C) Zacharias said that in addition to food assistance activities, the UN was working with the GOZ on a humanitarian response to Operation Restore Order. The UN and the GOZ had created two joint working groups to coordinate the response. He said he hoped that the experience of working together would lead to greater cooperation in the future. The UN and the GOZ were finalizing a joint appeal to assist the victims of Operation Restore Order, which should be released soon. The appeal would be for USD 30 million through the end of the year and would address the need for shelter, food, water, and sanitation. He said the government had agreed to allocate plots of land with security of tenure to displaced families and that IOM planned to provide tents to these families until new homes could be built.

4. (C) WFP Country Director Kevin Farrell repeated earlier WFP reports to Ambassador Hall that a direct GOZ request for food assistance was unlikely. Farrell said WFP had reluctantly accepted this reality and had folded Zimbabwe's needs into a reworked regional appeal for southern Africa that totals 745,000 MT. Of the 300,000 MT envisioned for Zimbabwe, Farrell reported that WFP had already secured 70,000 MT. However, the pipeline would run dry in October and more pledges were needed. He told the Ambassador that the lack of a formal GOZ aid request was not hampering operations and that WFP and the GOZ were close to an agreement that would allow WFP's traditional NGO partners to distribute food assistance without interference. WFP Regional Director Michael Sackett reported that Zimbabwe had the region's most pressing food situation, but acknowledged that GOZ stonewalling and chronic food needs in neighboring Malawi, Zambia, and southern Mozambique could dampen donor enthusiasm for aiding Zimbabwe.

15. (C) Farrell told Ambassador Hall that the GOZ,s food security assessment had indicated that 2.9 million people, or 36 percent of the rural population, would need assistance. However, he said the assessment was based on unrealistically optimistic assumptions (reftel). WFP had relaxed the assumptions and produced a higher estimate of 5 million people needing food, or 62 percent of the rural population.

16. (C) The UN representatives collectively questioned the GOZ,s ability to finance food imports, given the country,s economic deterioration and foreign exchange shortages. FAO Country Director Geoffrey Mrema cited South African data that show grain exports to Zimbabwe measured 210,121 MT between May 1 and July 22, in addition to estimated imports of 20,000 MT from Mozambique during the same period. Mrema, however, questioned whether these imports, which average 19,200 MT per week, were sustainable.

Viewing Restore Order,s Devastation

17. (C) Ambassador Hall visited Hatcliff Farm, a residential area outside Harare that had been destroyed by Operation Restore Order, on August 11. During the 1990s, the area was used to resettle people from one of Harare,s worst slums. A joint World Bank/USAID program had provided the area with water and sanitation infrastructure. The GOZ provided residents valid leases for the land at the time of resettlement. Despite these legal documents, the houses were bulldozed and their occupants forcibly removed. Residents told the Ambassador how police with dogs arrived without notice to drive them out. After a USAID protest, some people have been allowed to return. However, residents told Ambassador Hall they were in &survival mode,8 without shelter, warm clothing, food, or access to water and sanitation during the coldest months of Zimbabwe,s winter.

18. (C) On his last day in country, August 13, Ambassador Hall also attempted to visit Hopely Farm, a holding camp run by the military for people displaced by Operation Restore Order. However, he was denied entry, ostensibly because IOM had failed to secure the necessary permission from the Ministry of Information for the visit to proceed. Ironically, while negotiating with the individuals in charge of the camp, Ambassador Hall watched a truck off-loading U.S. food assistance. The Ambassador was told in confidence by someone at the site that conditions were grim and that &old people8 were dying at the camp.

NGOs Report Government Obstruction

19. (C) During a USAID-hosted roundtable, Ambassador Hall heard from NGOs a laundry list of government obstructionism that has hampered their relief operations. C-Safe, a consortium of relief NGOs operating in southern Africa, reported that it had more than 10,000 MT of food destined for Zimbabwe sitting in Durban awaiting GOZ clearance. Some NGOs reported they had failed for the past year to get import permits. (N.B. USAID plans to relay details of these import difficulties to Minister Goche, who said he was unaware of any problems but promised during his meeting with Ambassador Hall that his staff would look into them.) The NGOs noted the GOZ also complicated distribution within Zimbabwe; one group reported that in the past year it had been able to distribute only half of its 20,000 MT stock.

Mutare Visit Highlights UN Successes

110. (SBU) On August 12, Ambassador Hall and his delegation traveled to eastern Zimbabwe to visit examples of successful WFP and FAO projects that address the needs of persons living with or affected by HIV and AIDS. At the first location near Mutare, the Ambassador saw WFP and American NGO Africare distribute food to more than 3,000 families, often through home care givers because the family members were too ill to travel to the distribution location. Ambassador Hall accompanied one care-giver who was delivering rations to a widow and to an orphan who was caring for four younger siblings. Ambassador Hall then traveled to an FAO project near Rusape that helped farmers grow vegetables by providing drip irrigation kits, a technology originally pioneered in Zimbabwe by USAID.

Comment

111. (C) The GOZ,s ability to scrape together enough foreign exchange to pay for food imports remains the question of the day, especially as the hunger season of September through

April approaches and local and WFP reserves dwindle. What is unfortunately clear after the Ambassador,s visit is that only a major interruption in food imports would cause the GOZ to ask for aid directly. The Ambassador,s visit did help demonstrate to the Zimbabwean people U.S. resolve to provide assistance to them via WFP,s regional appeal and smaller, but nonetheless important bilateral deliveries, regardless of their own government,s irresponsible behavior.

112. (U) USUN Rome cleared this message.
SCHULTZ